Basil (Mrs Basil) Hall

March 1945

THE ESPALIER

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER

THE ESPALIER

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS
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TO

P. C. BUCK

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THE ESPALIER

QUIET NEIGHBOURS

Sitting alone at night
Careless of time,
From the house next door
I hear the clock chime.

Ten, eleven, twelve;
One, two, three—
It is all the same to the clock,
And much the same to me.

But to-night more than sense heard it:
I opened my eyes wide
To look at the wall and wonder
What lay on the other side.

They are quiet people
That live next door;
I never hear them scrape
Their chairs along the floor,

They do not laugh loud, or sing,
Or scratch in the grate,
I have never seen a taxi
Drawn up at their gate;

And though their back-garden
Is always neat and trim
It has a humbled look,
And no one walks therein.

So did not their chiming clock
Imply some hand to wind it,
I might doubt if the wall between us
Had any life behind it.

London neighbours are such
That I may never know more
Than this of the people
Who live next door.

While they, for their part,
Should they hazard a guess
At me on my side of the wall
Will know as little, or less;

For my life has grown quiet,
As quiet as theirs;
And the clock has been silent on my chimney-piece
For years and for years.

LONDON CHURCHYARD

As I walked through London
To ease my care,
I snuffed amid the houses
A greener air;

And behind iron railings
I saw branches wave,
Tossing their wild arms
Over, O! many a grave.

Such a sight as this
Pleased me very well.
I peered through the railings
That had a rusty smell—

All of a sudden
I heard a cry;
And saw a dark something
Crouched a new stone near-by.

It seemed lorn and witless
As sea-weed on a beach;
But it lamented
With a woman's speech.

'Woe's me, my lover!
Cold-hearted you are grown.
The breast where I laid my head
Lies beneath a stone.

'I thought I held you fast
My kind arms between,
But now you are gone from me
As if you'd never been.

'Falsely have you dealt with me,
Falsely have you beguiled.
Dead and buried with you
Lies my child.'

Piteously, piteously,
Thus did she rave,
And wrung her hands,
And scratched on the grave.

COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

'AWAKE, good neighbours all,
That wake not for the day.
The churchyard yews won't spread the news—
No tales tell they.
Awake, good neighbours, scramble out of your sepulchres,
Cold lying is clay:'
'No,' mumbled they, 'No, no.
Suppose the golden cock should crow.'

'You loved a merry life—
For one more jaunt uprouse.
The moonlit stones above your bones
Show where you house:
Benjamin Harris, John French late of this parish,
Mary his spouse:'
'No,' mumbled they, 'No, no.
Suppose the golden cock should crow.'

'Awake, for time is short,
Your hour will soon be told.
Link bony hands, and dance in bands,
Nor dint the mould.
You'll caper limberly with no flesh to cumber ye—
Better than of old:'
'No,' mumbled they, 'No, no.
Suppose the golden cock should crow.'

'Let friends and neighbours meet
With curtsey, beck, and bow.
When back in bed, if a maidenhead
Or a marriage vow
Doesn't tally exactly with who's under which blanket,
'Twon't matter now:'
'No,' mumbled they, 'No, no.
Suppose the golden cock should crow.'

'Faint-hearted you are grown,
Neighbours, by lying dead.
This cock, your bane, is a weather-vane
With gilt overspread;
A trumpery figure, put up by the new vicar—
Nothing to dread:'
'No,' mumbled they, 'No, no.
Suppose the golden cock should CROW.'

IN THE PARLOUR

(i)

Come away from the door.
It has grown late;
The air is chill and frore,
And those whom you await
Will not pass by any more.

Close the shutters aright
And make all fast.
We shall have rain belike,
The sky is overcast:
No one will come here to-night.

Sit you down by my side,
Sing an old song.
Since you have been my bride
How well I like these long
Quiet evenings in Advent-tide.

IN THE PARLOUR

(ii)

He How unobtrusively the snow
Comes down beyond the crimson blind!
I see it not, but through my mind
Sieve the large flakes, both soft and slow,
Warding us in from humankind.

She My nimble needle forth and back
Goes twanging through the tambour-frame
To stitch a bird without a name.
If an indifferent heart should crack
'Twould sound, I fancy, much the same.

He A cruel night for beast or man
To be abroad. But we might doubt
By this warm hearth the snow shut out,
Save for a denser silence than
Is wont to compass us about.

She The needle and the web, how fine!
The silks no thicker than a hair!
Each choice of tint calls forth my care,
And slowly goes the great design.
No matter. I have time to spare.

He 'Twill soon be time to go to bed—
Sweet bed, but cold! Drowsed though I be
I'll sit it out until I see
The wooden bird put forth his head,
And beck, and cry Cuckoo! to me.

She With every length of gliding floss
Wrought in to make my sampler gay
So much life's thread I stitch away.
But this bright wing will flaunt the gloss
Of life when I am dull as clay.

He Cuckoo! Cuckoo! My dear, you heard
The clock? Another evening gone!
She Asleep?
He Not quite.
She You've scarcely stirred.
He In grave consideration
My thoughts upon that silly bird
Were fixed.
She And mine on this.
He Absurd!
We even think in unison.

TUDOR CHURCH MUSIC

HERE in the minster tower
I sit alone,
While to mind's ear old books
Mumble and drone;
And the warm sun slants in
Over the cold stone.

Through the long afternoon
I hear the clock
Preach to the empty church:
Tick-tock. Tick-tock.
O, a rare text to expound
To a sleeping flock!

The patient organist
Who scrolled this clef;
The boy who drew him horned
On Gibbons in F;
Singers and hearers all
Are dumb and deaf—

'Dumb and deaf, dead and dust,'
Confirms the clock.
And life seems so far off
That at the shock
I see my calm hand start,
When footsteps knock

Upon stair. Holiday-makers
Out on a trip
To whom the verger propounds
Each trusty quip,
While, mute, they fidget together
In uneasy fellowship.

And only when they are gone
Do I doff the mask
Of the scholar deep in his book:
'Did they see me?' I ask,
'Or am I, too, a ghost?' and so
Turn once more to my task.

AN AFTERNOON CALL

To shelter from the thunder-drench
A scorched and sorefoot tramping wench
Came to my door and proffered me
Lilac, that I had viewed her wrench
Out of my neighbour's tree.

I bade her in. With glances keen
She eyed my well-found kitchen, scene
Of kind domestic arts;
Like one who curious and serene
Looks round on foreign parts.

She talked of winds and wayside fruits,
Seas, cities, fair-times, landmarks, routes
Of journeys past and gone.
I gave her an old pair of boots
That she might wander on.

WISH IN SPRING

To-day I wish that I were a tree,
And not myself,
Confronting spring with a neat little row of poems
Like cups and saucers on a shelf.

For then I should have poems innumerable,
One kissing the other;
Authentic, perfect in shape and lovely variety,
And all of the same tireless green colour.

No one would think it unnatural
Or question my right;
All day I would wave them above the heads of people,
And sing them to myself all night.

But as I am only a woman
And not a tree,
With piteous human care I have made this poem,
And set it now on the shelf with the rest to be.

THE VIRGIN AND THE SCALES

This is a public park;
You may not pick the flowers,
Or loiter after hours,
Or kiss too deep in the dark.
Yet here is green, and sweet
Forgetfulness of the street;
Deep walks of chestnut and lime
Where the old may pass away time,
Pleasant picnicing places
For children with shabby faces,
Lawns blowing in the sun
Where dogs may roll and run,
And the patient grass
For lover and lass.
Is this then not enough?
No, not enough for one
I met there.
Who?
A nun.
(And yet, God knows, so old,
So battered with untold
Heavenly housewifery,
So vowed to poverty,
You would not think to find
Ambition in her mind.)
In wintry woollen stuff
Of abstinence was she dressed,
And winter was on her breast;

But midsummer's most complete
Honey-coloured, honey-sweet
Plenteousness was her plunder,
Standing the lime-tree under.

No housewife shelling peas,
No Saint upon her knees
Telling God's praises over,
Slip-finger, nor bees in clover,
Nor girl-child gathering
Cowslips in the spring
Showed with more innocence
Delight in diligence
Than she, cramming her bag
With golden handfuls of swag.
Love knit my heart to her:
I approached; but at the stir
Of footfall she glanced round,
Loosed her rich branch, and frowned
With such an air of doubt
As children show found out
In fault, till seeing that I
Smiled, she in turn looked sly
And faster than before
Plucked on. Said I: 'Here's more
Than you can lessen, though you
Should gather the whole day through
For your lime-blossom tea.'
'It is God's gift,' said she,
'And pleasant for the sick.

It grows so clean and thick
'Twere shame to let it waste.
Aye, gathered it *should* be.
But I must work in haste
Lest the Keeper come along
And tell me I do wrong.'

I looked up overhead
And saw the lime-tree spread
Above us like a tent;
Like a green and golden pavilion
Of some Arabian Night,
Murmuring as with consent,
And gleaming as though alight
With a million, with a million
Loops and tassels of scent.

I thought then: Who could grudge
Blooms to this holy drudge,
Or stay her wrinkled, deft
Old hands from their kind theft?
She thief, lawbreaker? She?
As well accuse the tree,
That day-long with sweet skill
Steals sap, steals chlorophyl;
That from earth, from dew, from air
Thieves that it may be fair
And show its works to men,
Who beholding it then

May glorify their Father
In heaven.
No, but look farther.
I touch not blossom nor leaf,
And I, I am the Thief!
Thief so cunning and fell
That I am Keeper as well.
Good cause had she to frown
At my shadow blackening down;
For every joy I take
Becomes an iron grate,
And my innocent delights
Plant rows of iron spikes;
Worst, self-denying, this trick
Of integrity—not to pick
Blossom, bruise leaf, destroy
Aught from the common joy—
Binds in an iron band
My heart and prompts my hand,
Now lifted up to bless
In scrupulous emptiness,
To write these words of hate
THOU SHALT NOT on every gate.

Yet here is solace, and sweet
Redemption from the street;
A pause, a look of pity
For the begrimed city,
Green almsgiving, a lake
Of green where men may slake

Parched senses, wash off care.
Ah, if it only were
Not so precious, so deadly dear,
So dearly defrayed a delight
That whosoever comes here
Must come as Thief outright,
Or cloaking his envious mind
With love of humankind,
And with caution and mistrust
Walking among the just
Grow Thief so cunning and fell
That perforce he's Keeper as well.
Poor drudge, you had reason to start,
When with love in my heart
I approached you, as though you saw
In me the offended law.
Truly, to-day I must be
Offended because of thee.
For every blossom you pick
Must wound me to the quick,
And by that bag you've crammed
With mercies I am damned;
Worst, worst, your innocence,
Your happy, happy love,
Your hand, so hand in glove
With the tree's consenting,
Is a sword to drive me hence,
Lamenting, lamenting;
Is a flame brandished to fright
Me from a forfeited delight,

Repenting, repenting;
Is a key in the unrelenting
Hand of the uncreate,
Locking the garden gate.

O why must my spirit pine
For a few handfuls of lime
Plucked by a poor old nun,
Whose cares are all in one
Concern so summed up and shriven
That were I to tell her but half
Of the coil through which she's driven
My thoughts, she must either laugh
As a nurse laughs at a child,
Or with a sigh, maybe a frown
For one so devil-wiled,
Brush all my vain-wit down?
And yet I linger, I delay,
Hankering, as though some clue
She had hold of, answer knew.
As though, should I say:
'No, dear, you may not pick
Lime-blossom for the sick;
For know you not, since the Fall
Not one tree, but all, all
Must bear forbidden fruit,
And are poisoned at the root
By man's repentant tears?'—
She might reply: 'Yet here's
Good warrant for what I do.

When he was walking through
The harvest he plucked the ears
Of corn and shared them among
Those with him, for they were an hungered, and so was he.
Thus his disciples he taught
How to steal as they ought,
In joy and peace of heart;
Thus he took the sinner's part;
So much to thieves a friend
That he had them with him till the end;
Thus, thus, he would set us free.
But till everyone believes
In him we must all be thieves.'

I BRING HER A FLOWER

Sweet faith
Such looks of quiet hath
That those on whom she's smiled
Lie down to sleep as easy as a child.

No night,
However dark, can fright
Them, no, nor day
To come, however bleak and fell, dismay.

But sound
Sleep they in prison-bound
As when at liberty.
And if they wake, they wake in charity;

Like her,
Who rousing at the jar
Of weary foot in the rain
Pitied the wakeful sentry for his pain.

Like her: Rosa Luxemburg.

THE LENTEN OFFERING

Christ, here's a thorn
More poison-fanged than any that you knew:
On the north side of our churchyard it grew,
Where lie the suicides and babes chance-born.

Christ, here are nails,
Once driven in, will never lose their hold:
Forged at Krupp's, Creusot's, Vickers', and tipped with gold
Pen-nibs that signed the Treaty of Versailles.

Christ, here's a sharp
Spear, can wound deeper than all other spears:
In baths of human blood and human tears
Tempered, and whetted on the human heart.

CAVES OF HARMONY

Play, dark musician, play—
How almost human sounds your saxophone!
(Somewhere in Africa
An angry lion tosses up a bone.)

Sambo's a ready scholar
And hides his black skin under a black coat.
Although he wears a collar
Adam's own apple yet sticks in his throat.

Play, dark musician, play—
I see your imitation diamond flash.
(Once in America
Your fathers howled and writhed beneath the lash.)

How leers the blackamoor,
Exhaling his melodious delight!
Music's his paramour;
And yours, and mine, since we dance here to-night.

Play, dark musician, play—
Outdo the beast's roar and the scourged slave's moan.
Ambassador from U.S.A.,
How almost human sounds your saxophone!

OLD MAN

Reading in bawdy books
The old man sits.
De Sade plays Abishag
To his cold wits.

Under his bushy brows
His eyes are mild—
There's no more harm in him
Than in a child.

SONG FROM THE BRIDE OF SMITHFIELD

A THOUSAND guileless sheep have bled,
A thousand bullocks knelt in fear,
To daub my Henry's cheek with red
And round the curl above his ear.

And wounded calves hung up to drip
Have in slow sweats distilled for him
The dew that polishes his lip,
The inward balm that oils each limb.

In vain I spread my maiden arts,
In vain for Henry's love I pine.
He is too skilled in bleeding hearts
To turn this way and pity mine.

LET ME GO!

Any wind but this—
That with remembrance of rain
Grown soft and pitiful, embraced me
As I walked homeward.

And any other look
Than the full-moon sheds to-night—
As though she bent like a mother
Above her sleeping children.

Not to be denied
The wind gropes over the house;
And now it has brushed aside the curtains
And walks about the room.

Too well, too well I know
Whence you have journeyed, O Wind!
And what the landscape of nestling hill and valley
That the moon eyes so lovingly.

COUNTRY THOUGHT FROM A TOWN

(i)

Averted from myself
I walk up and down—
I see how in the light of the arc-lamps
The trees look stricken and brown.
Autumn is an unkindly thing
In a town.

The leaves fall aimlessly;
Frustrated in their decay,
With scraps of paper and bus-tickets
They will be swept away.

All the mortality in me
Yearns to go
Somewhere alone into the country,
Where elms stand in the hedgerow;
Through fields completed and contented
To walk to and fro—

To hear leaves falling
Like a quiet breath;
To be a partaker
In their death.

COUNTRY THOUGHT FROM A TOWN

(ii)

Cold, is it cold?
Blows there a wind
All night through?
Does a frozen dew
Lie on the wold?

Dark, is it dark?
Blotted from being
Cottage and garth?
Has the last hearth
Quenched its spark?

Still, is it still?
Wakes the wind only?
Sunk in a deep
Midwinter sleep
Valley and hill?

No, not all cold,
Nor yet all dark,
Nor yet quite still.
Such is not God's will.
In the sheepfold,

Warm in the ewe's fleece,
Lies the lamb newborn.
To and fro all night
The shepherd bears a light,
Telling his flock's increase.

THE GREEN VALLEY

HERE in the green scooped valley I walk to and fro.
In all my journeyings I have not seen
A place so tranquil, so green;
And yet I think I have seen it long ago,
The grassy slopes, and the cart-track winding, so.

O now I remember it well, now all is plain,
Why twitched my memory like a dowser's rod
At waters hidden under sod.
When I was a child they told me of Charlemagne,
Of Gan the traitor, and Roland outmatched and slain.

Weeping for Roland then, I scooped in my spirit
A scant green Roncesvalles, a holy ground,
Which here in Dorset I've found:
But finding, I knew it not. The years disinherit
Their children. The horn is blown, but I do not hear it.

GHOSTS AT CHALDON HERRING

Hush, my dear, hush!
Who are these that pass
Up Shady Lane?
Their feet don't brush
Any dew from the grass
And they are silent, too.

Hand in kind hand
Go some, and closelier linked
Another twain;
And others stand
As a-drouse, indistinct
Beneath the darkening boughs.

Ghosts, ghosts are these!—
Long-dead lasses, each
Beside her swain—
Between the trees
Pacing slow, without speech,
As they were wont to go.

Strange, some should choose
Thus their mouldered dears
To meet again,
Whom long misuse
Of marriage, taunts and tears,
And the slow grudge of age

Warped and estranged;
Sure, this place above
All others fain
They'd leave unranged,
Lest a gaunt dead love
Them, like a dead child, haunt.

Ah, but not so
These who in true-love-knot
Their arms enchain.
Dead long ago
Are they all, and forgot
The life that held them thrall.

Nought now exists
Save fancies nursed apart.
And of all this train
Scarce one that trysts
With a seeming sweetheart
But walks beside a dream.

THE TRAVELLER ENCOUNTERED

The highroad runs plain
Between Thaxted and Dunmow,
But I had chosen to go
By bridle-path and lane;
To see the champaign,
And the stooks a-row—
There I met an old fellow
Standing in the rain.

He was bowed and lean;
But clear was his eye
As a rift of March sky,
His face like a quarrendine.
'You must have seen
Many changes,' said I.
'Changes, lady? Aye!
Four times I have been

'Forced to lie abed;
Once I had the ague,
And thrice did I spew
Up my blood so red.
'Twas my lungs, Doctor said,
And the most I could do
To last a week or two—
Ten years he's been dead.

'My wife died.
And then after her
My eldest daughter.
Eight years come Whitsuntide
The house where we did bide
Was pulled down. It stood yonder,
Just by that tall fir
With the rick alongside.'

Thus did he talk,
Twisting the while
A sprig of camomile
Or a corn-stalk.
'Follow the grassy baulk
Till you come to a stile.'
So, mile by mile,
He told over my walk.

Musing on country folk
I bade him good-day.
And going on my way
To myself I spoke:
As well might I invoke
These hedges to say
Who passed by yesterday;
Or question yonder oak,

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Bidding it declare
What changes it had seen.
'In summer I was green,
Acorns did I bear.
Come winter, I was bare.
For years full eighteen
This meadow has not been
Under the ploughshare.'

But Labour-in-Vain
Was the epitome
Of changes sighed to me
By the doomed champaign.
And turning once again,
Far off did I see
The man and the tree
Standing in the rain.

THE REPOSE

At Bradwell in the marshes
There is an inn.
Few are the travellers
Have rested therein.

The folk that sit there
Have but little to say;
They sit looking out of the window
At the churchyard across the way.

Growing among the graves
Is a green weeping willow.
The graves are all green
And peaceful as a pillow.

The bar-parlour is shaded
With a green gloom,
As if the willow-branches
Were waving in the room.

Churchyard and church and inn—
They are all very old.
Even the beer they draw there
Seems to taste of the mould.

THE TRAVELLER BENIGHTED

On through the quiet country-side
The road runs small and white,
The trees stand still on either side
As if to watch me there—
But stilled, stilled is the air
At the oncome of night.

And see, behind my back the moon
Eyes me with steadfast gaze;
I did not think she'd spill so soon
Her silver in the brook—
But calm, calm is her look
As she mounts through the haze.

As though I'd shed it like a husk,
My body casts no shade;
I walk suspended in the dusk
Just as a spirit might,
For yet, yet there is light
In the west—but 'twill fade

Yes, fade it will, and I shall trace
My bobbing shadow spread
Before me on the whitened face
Of the road where I must go.
And then, then I shall know
What it is that I dread.

THE HAPPY DAY

All day long
I purpose in yonder
Green meadows to wander
And think of a song.

I shall take
Provision of berries,
Black treacle cherries,
And possibly cake.

Where the boughs
Of gliding willows
Freckle green pillows
I shall drowse,

Or wander blithe
Through scented acres
Where haymakers
Sharpen the scythe.

I shall not lack,
I shall not trouble;
Through fields of stubble
I shall come back—

While dusk is spread,
While twilight lingers—
With purple fingers,
A song in my head.

NELLY TRIM

'Like men riding,
The mist from the sea
Drives down the valley
And baffles me.'
'Enter, traveller,
Whoever you be.'

By lamplight confronted
He staggered and peered;
Like a wet bramble
Was his beard.
'Sit down, stranger,
You look a-feared.'

Shudders rent him
To the bone,
The wet ran off him
And speckled the stone.
'Dost bide here alone, maid?'
'Yes, alone.'

As he sat down
In the chimney-nook
Over his shoulder
He cast a look,
As if the night
Were pursuing; she took

A handful of brash
To mend the fire,
He eyed her close
As the flame shot higher;
He spoke—and the cattle
Moved in the byre.

'Though you should heap
Your fire with wood,
'Twouldn't warm me,
Nor do no good,
Unless you first warm me
As a maiden should.'

With looks unwavering,
With breath unstirred,
She took off her clothes
Without a word;
And stood up naked
And white as a curd.

He breathed her to him
With famished sighs,
Against her bosom
He sheltered his eyes,
And warmed his hands
Between her thighs.

Strangely assembled
In the quiet room,
Alone alight
Amidst leagues of gloom,
So brave a bride,
So sad a groom;

And strange love-traffic
Between these two;
Nor mean, nor shamefaced—
As though they'd do
Something more solemn
Than they knew:

As though by this greeting
Which chance had willed
'Twixt him so silent
And her so stilled,
Some pledge or compact
Were fulfilled,

Made for all time
In times unknown,
'Twixt man and woman
Standing alone
In mirk night
By a tall stone.

His wayfaring terrors
All cast aside,
Brave now the bridegroom
Quitted the bride;
As he came, departing—
Undenied.

But once from darkness
Turned back his sight
To where in the doorway
She held a light:
'Goodbye to you, maiden.'
'Stranger, good night.'

Long time has this woman
Been bedded alone.
The house where she dwelt
Lies stone on stone:
She'd not know her ash-tree,
So warped has it grown.

But yet this story
Is told of her
As a memorial;
And some aver
She'd comfort thus any
Poor traveller.

A wanton, you say—
Yet where's the spouse,
However true
To her marriage-vows,
To whom the lot
Of the earth-born allows

More than this?—
To comfort the care
Of a stranger, bound
She knows not where,
And afraid of the dark,
As his fathers were.

EPITAPHS

(i)

HERE lies Melissa Mary Thorn
Together with her son, still-born;
Whose loss her husband doth lament.
He has a large estate in Kent.

(ii)

AFTER long thirty years re-met
I, William Clarke, and I, Jeanette
His wife, lie side by side once more;
But quieter than we lay before.

(iii)

A WIDOWED mother reared this stone
To Annott Clare, aged twenty-one.
Seven live sons have I, but she
Was dearer than them all to me.

(iv)

HERE lies the body of Tom Fool,
Who died, a little boy, at school
Oft did he bleed and oft did weep,
And whimpering, now has fallen asleep.

(v)

JOHN Bird, a labourer, lies here,
Who served the earth for sixty years
With spade and mattock, drill and plough;
But never found it kind till now.

THE SAILOR

I HAVE a young love—
A landward lass is she—
And thus she entreated:
'O tell me of the sea,
That on thy next voyage
My thoughts may follow thee.'

I took her up a hill
And showed her hills green,
One after other
With valleys between:
So green and gentle, I said,
Are the waves I've seen.

I led her by the hand
Down the grassy way,
And showed her the hedgerows
That were white with may:
So white and fleeting, I said,
Is the salt sea-spray.

I bade her lean her head
Down against my side,
Rising and falling
On my breath to ride:
Thus rode the vessel, I said,
On the rocking tide.

For she so young is, and tender,
I would not have her know
What it is that I go to
When to sea I must go,
Lest she should lie awake and tremble
When the great storm-winds blow.

THE IMAGE

'Why do you look so pale, my son William?
Where have you been so long?'
'I've been to my sweetheart, Mother,
As it says in the song.'

'Though you be pledged and cried to the parish
'Tis not fitting or right
To visit a young maiden
At this hour of night.'

'I went not for her sweet company,
I meant not any sin,
But only to walk round her house
And think she was within.

'Unbeknown I looked in at the window;
And there I saw my bride
Sitting lonesome in the chimney-nook,
With the cat alongside.

'Slowly she drew out from under her apron
An image made of wax,
Shaped like a man, and all stuck over
With pins and with tacks.

'Hair it had, hanging down to its shoulders,
Straight as any tow—
Just such a lock she begged of me
But three days ago.

'She set it down to stand in the embers—
The wax began to run.
Mother! Mother! That waxen image,
I think it was your son!'

''Twas but a piece of maiden's foolishness,
Never think more of it.
I warrant that when she's a wife
She'll have a better wit.'

'Maybe, maybe, Mother.
I pray you, mend the fire.
For I am cold to the knees
With walking through the mire.

'The snow is melting under the rain,
The ways are full of mud;
The cold has crept into my bones,
And glides along my blood.

'Take out, take out my winding-sheet
From the press where it lies,
And borrow two pennies from my money-box
To put upon my eyes;

'For now the cold creeps up to my heart,
My ears go Ding, go Dong:
I shall be dead long before day,
For winter nights are long.'

'Cursèd, cursèd be that Devil's vixen
To rob you of your life!
And cursèd be the day you left me
To go after a wife!'

'Why do you speak so loud, Mother?
I was almost asleep.
I thought the churchbells were ringing
And the snow lay deep.

'Over the white fields we trod to our wedding,
She leant upon my arm—
What have I done to her that she
Should do me this harm?'

GREEN PASTURES

'O, I COULD lean
And look for ever
At such a scene!—
And bless the Giver,
Who beauty gave, and best of all,
Sameness, unwearied and perpetual.

'Let such a sight
Brim up my seeing,
And with delight
Renew my being,
Until the prospect calm and kind
Seem the reflection of my mind!'

Said t'other: 'At most
This field you're praising
Has but the boast
Of being good grazing.
You're easy pleased if what you like
Best be a green field and a stone dyke.'

THE SOLDIER'S RETURN

Jump through the hedge, lass!
Run down the lane!
Here's your soldier-laddie
Come back again.

Coming over the hill
With the sunset at his back—
Never be feared, lass,
Though he look black;

Coming through the meadow
And leaping the watercourse—
Never be feared, lass,
Though his voice be hoarse;

Belike he's out of breath
With walking from the town.
He will speak better
When the sun's gone down.

BLACK EYES

Long Molly Samways
Went by just then.
Strange, how that girl
Gets off with the men!

With her head wig-waggling
On her long neck,
And her hair straggling
Down her back.

Past ten of the clock
She'll get up in a daze,
And spend the morning
Lacing her stays.

She wouldn't go
To the Whitsun Fair
Because of the trouble
Of getting there;

And if she be common
To half the town,
'Tis to please her back
That she lies her down.

Such a long, lazy
Slug-a-bed
Won't have her sleep out
Until she's dead.

And the Judgement Trump
May split the skies—
Though it should wake her
I doubt if she'll rise.

BLUE EYES

Barbara Cushion
Weeps in the lane,
And vows she will never
Go brambling again.

Down her fat face
Fat teardrops run,
And splash on her bosom,
One by one;

With sobs and cries
She shakes like a shape—
What is the matter,
Is it a rape?

Oh no! It's her feelings,
Poor girl, that smart;
And Jem's unkindness
Has broken her heart.

For months she has had
A mind to Jem,
So when she set out
She smiled at him;

Down the green lane
She watched him come—
But all he did
Was to pinch her bum.

FARMER MAW

Who's he you saw,
Stranger, among the stooks?—
'Tis Farmer Maw
Scaring away the rooks.

Once, stout and tall,
He had no peer to plough;
But this is all
Poor Farmer's fit for now.

On Lammas Eve
He hoed the Seven Acre,
And taking leave
Looked round like God the Maker:

His hay well ricked—
His fields secure and small—
With a most strict
Eye he surveyed them all;

And finding less
Than usual to offend
His carefulness,
Went home, and made an end.

After she saw
Hired bailiff reap and bind,
Poor Widow Maw
Sat down and called to mind

How oft her Dear
Exclaimed with scornful oaths
At waste of gear
Unthrift. His working clothes

She fetched, and laid
Them out upon a table;
Though patched and frayed
They yet were serviceable—

Aye, in such worn
Apparel, and bemired,
As men might scorn,
Scarecrow were well-attired.

Thus, stuffed with straw,
As large as life he stands—
A shape of awe—
And overlooks his lands,

His flocks and herds:
But sore, poor soul! beshit;
For those bold birds
Don't honour him a whit.

MRS. SUMMERBEE GROWN OLD

As tall as the church tower,
And as stark,
The churchyard elm
Rears into the dark.

And many's the evening
I've walked in dread
To think that its boughs
Were overhead;

And many's the midnight
I've waked in fear
To think that its branches
Were drawing near.

For we live here alone—
The Rector and I,
Both of us grown old,
And unwilling to die;

And the churchyard elm
Has arms like a fiend:
Many's the dark night
I've thought they leaned

Downward, downward—
As though they'd claw
Us into the churchyard
Like things of straw.

But thanks to the rulers
Of the realm
We are delivered
From the elm.

For the Inspector
Chanced this way.
He wrote in his book,
And had his say

Of regulations
And bye-laws—
Then came the woodman
And cut its claws.

Harmless and glum
The monster stands
And holds to heaven
Its baffled hands.

The Rector and I
Can walk beneath,
Untroubled by
The fear of death.

And on still nights
When no one's about
I dance round the elm,
And thus do I flout:

Coffin-tree, coffin-tree,
You shall get neither him nor me!
Your branches are lopped,
Your games are all stopped.

STOCK

Farmer Hood's wife
Was brought to bed.
'Look at the baby!'
The midwife said.

Scantly he glanced
At the babe she bore.
He had seen plenty
Like it before;

And 'Troubles,' quoth he,
'Never come by half,
For the Guernsey heifer
Has slipped her calf.'

THE OLD SQUIRE

Squire England has grown old:
Too stiff to ride to hounds,
Too blind to shoot his coverts,
He takes up his great stick
And potters about the grounds.

The meadows and the pond,
The fig-tree on the south wall,
The plantation of young spruces,
The yew hedge twelve foot thick—
He stares at them all;

And grumbling as he goes,
He stops here and there
To spud up a dandelion.
His mind is full of doubt,
For a stranger is his heir.

House, meadows, walks and trees,
Although his sight be dim
He sees them very plainly;
He prays that none may flout
The things so dear to him.

MOPING CASTLE

'WHY have you planted firs
About your dwelling,
Of trees created
Choosing the most adverse
To mortal cheer?
Whose breasts uncouth, both song
And spring repelling,
With endless sighs are freighted;
Foreboding every year
A deeper wrong.

'Or have you planted firs
About your dwelling
That they in proxy
Might all your sighs rehearse?
Ill-starred one! doomed
To mourn your frustrate prime,
Your sons rebelling,
Your Dear another's doxy,
Your mouldered heart entombed
In waste of time.'

'No, Friend. I planted firs
About my dwelling;
But, I protest, meant
No clue so apt for verse
As you conceive
These sombre groves to give.

Soon ripe for felling,
Firs are a good investment;
And though I live to grieve,
Yet I must live.'

THE SICK MAN'S GARDEN

He has been ill so long
  On whom it depended,
  That the garden untended
Is beginning to go wrong.

The gate has fallen awry,
  The tools are half rusted—
  They will be encrusted
All over, by and by.

The rose has broken loose
  From the arch where he trained it;
  Dead petal on petal has stained it
With its own juice.

Walks and plots are unkempt—
  It is all dishevelled;
  Like a skein unravelled,
Like a forgotten thing dream'd.

And peering through the gate,
  And closing in around it,
  The thickets that bound it
Seem to be lying in wait.

My heart foretells the day
  Toward which it moulders,
  When men with bowed shoulders
Shall carry him away.

Herb-border and flower-bed
  Underfoot they shall trample,
  And briar and bramble
Make slower their slow tread.

The mourners as they pass
  Will stumble and shuffle,
  Their steps shall be muffled
With the swishing of long grass.

Departed the last black form
  And the last black shadow,
  From thicket and meadow
Shall clamber in a swarm

Of wildings and weeds out-cast,
  By exile eagered
  For the garden beleaguered
Which has fallen to them at last.

By these remorseless, dumb
  Spoilers invaded,
  The flowers unaided
Shall all be overcome;

Save only those at need's
  Touch who turn traitors,
  Changing their natures
And reverting again to weeds.

Thus shall wild earth be paid
  The debt so long owing;
  Whilst he, unknowing,
Deep in wild earth is laid.

WHITE MAGIC

Young man, be warned by me,
  And shun the hour
  When the full moon has power
To sway men like the sea.

I with my love kept tryst
  One moonlight night.
  Something did us affright—
And she went home unkissed.

We saw as clear as day
  The things we knew;
  Only the sky more blue
Seemed, and the grass grown grey.

Round us the orchard trees
  Like spirits stood—
  When she threw back her hood,
She looked like one of these;

So blanched the face I knew
  It seemed estranged:
  Its moonlight aspect changed
My eager blood to dew.

Disheartened, we returned;
Nor met again.
I have grown old since then,
But I have never learned

By what mysterious art
The moonlight thieves
Colour from the young leaves,
And passion from the heart.

AS I WAS A-WALKING

SWEETLY fell the rain on the springing grass,
The birds sang all with voices as clear as glass;
To greet the blackthorn I turned aside—
A presence too lovely to pass—
But as with worship I neared it, a man I espied
Asleep in the rain beneath the blossoming tree.

I forgot to look at the tree, I looked instead
At the man who lay so still with averted head.
Because I could not see his face
I wondered if he were dead.
My mind was full of doubt as I left the place—
But dead or alive he was a stranger to me.

IN THE COTSWOLDS

All day the rain
Fell on the wheat
And dripped from the gable
On to the stone;
And all day long
I sat alone
Save for the dog
Who slept at my feet.

Slept—till a-sudden
He roused in fear,
And snuffed at the door,
And would not be quelled.
I opened—and there
An old crone I beheld,
And round about her
The dusk drawn near.

Something she said—
But her voice was hollow,
And chill was the hand
She laid on mine.
Her words were a riddle
I could not untwine;
And when she turned onward
I knew I must follow.

I felt the watery
Stubble souse
My ankles, and round me
Saw corn-shocks blurred.
And faint and fainter
Yet I heard
The dog bark on
In the empty house.

THE LITTLE DEATH

What voice is this
Sings so, rings so
Within my head?
Not mine, for I am dead,

And a deep peace
Wraps me, haps me
From head to feet
Like a smooth winding-sheet.

Before my eyes
Reeling, wheeling,
Leaf-green stars
Have changed to purple bars

And flickered out;
Spinning, thinning,
Up the wall,
That has grown very tall.

Only that voice—
Distant, insistent;
Like the high
Stroked glass's airy cry;

Echoing on,
Winds me, binds me
As with a thread
Spun from my own head.

O speak not yet!
Forget me, let me
Lie here as calm
As saints that nurse their palm;

Whilst like a tide
Turning, returning,
Silence and gloom
Flow in and fill the room.

THE DIVER

Self-loving I strayed
Through leagues of fir-wood—
Dream-like as woods
In water suspended,
So hushed was the shade,
So cool the silence;

Nor stayed, till I saw
My watery woodlands
In a deep tarn
Hanging head-downward,
As though they would draw
The soul down after them.

I thought: How sweet
To bathe in those waters!
I stripped myself bare;
On the pine-needles
I settled my feet,
And dived in fearless

To greet with the glow
Of an ardent lover
That limpid depth,
That bride-bed of stillness
Which far below
Awaited my coming.

O, but beneath
The rocky cornice,
Ready to pounce
There lurked a Nixy!
With ice-cold teeth
She bit and tore me,

And wreathed her fierce
Embraces about me
In coil on coil
Of anguish unspeakable,
And snarled in my ears
With a voice of darkness.

In fear of my life
I fought the Nixy
Till back to her den
At last I drove her;
To whet her knife
And await the next-comer.

Dry-footed on shore
I scrunched the pine-needles,
And watched the tarn
And its basking tree-tops
Resume once more
Their lovely stillness:

All, all like a charm
Inveigled the spirit;
Prompted: How sweet
To bathe in these waters
Here is no harm—

But I knew better.

UPON A GENTLEMAN FALLING SERIOUSLY IN LOVE

Who loves his kind, loves bone,
Flesh, play of sinew, shoot
Of sense, the turn of a head,
A voice answering his own:
Who loves a house, loves stone,
Iron, plaster, brick, glass, lead,
Timber hewn off and mute—
And these alone.

Who wins his kind, wins store
Of joys, griefs, memories, brain's
Diligence, heart's ease, a share
Of life not his before:
Who gains a house, a core
Of blank and senseless air
Cased up in matter gains—
And nothing more.

Sun may warm stone, awaken
Casement, with farewell kiss
Flush thatch—'tis all a show.
Though man a more unshaken
Diurnal love bestow—
He gains not even this.

And blest are they whose thrall
Hearts can endure this passion,
Hopeless, uncompromised
By aught reciprocal;
Yea, saints emparadised
May love God after this fashion.

THE CAPRICIOUS LADY

No, no, I do not choose
Commonplace flowers like these!
Such artless pinks and blues—
Forget-me-not, maiden's-blush—
Are tedious to my sight.
But give me, if you'd please,
Blossoms more recondite:
Cocks-combs of crimson plush,
Large, spider-speckled, rare
Orchids, or tulips whose
Smooth flesh has learnt to wear
The colour of a bruise.

THEODORIC

Praise the great Goth, Theodoric!
Who, a true patriot, led
His northern hordes into Italy,
Where he'd be better fed.

Sturgeon, peacock, assafœtida—
Nought came amiss to him
(Though Peter Vischer of Nuremberg
Makes him out to be slim).

Once only did his appetite
Quail at a new dish;
When they served up an aged senator
In the shape of a large fish.

The dead eyes glared reproachfully—
Fear spawned in his blood
Agueish pangs innumerable
As fishes in the flood.

Not furs of marmot and zibeline,
Nor a great fire near-by,
Could warm the wretched Theodoric
As he lay waiting to die;

Chattering about old Symmachus,
And Boëthius his friend,
Who with no consolation but philosophy
Made a far braver end.

HONEY FOR TEA

I've sat in the sun
From three to five
Watching the bees
About the hive.
They are horribly alive!

From white to red,
From red to white,
They weave Euclidean
Tangles of flight,
And nowhere find delight:

But them a maniac
Industry eggs
Onward; they grapple
With hairy legs,
Methodical to the dregs.

The blossom rifled,
With laden thighs
Further each willing
Eunuch plies:
A dull way to fertilize.

And back to their cells
They come at last;
Armed, incurious,
Sailing past
Me where I sit aghast.

Oh, horrible
That aught can be
So sufficient, yet
So unlike me!
I shall go in to tea.

There in the parlour
I shall find
Things to restore
My peace of mind;
By man for man designed.

The rat-tail spoons,
The china dishes,
Smooth as the sequined
Sides of fishes,
Obedient to my wishes;

The sturdy table
So plain and whole,
The meek sweet
Of the sugar-bowl;
These shall confirm my soul

Till I, emboldened,
Lift down from the shelf
The hoarded treasure,
Taken by stealth
From that inimical Commonwealth.

BODLEY'S LIBRARY

CHAINED to their shelves
Sit Origen,
Aquinas, Gregory
Nazianzen,
Bede, Alcuin, Scotus—
All the wise men
Of golden mouth
And faithful pen.

Falcons once
Of piercing flight,
Chained they must needs be
Or out of sight
They'd soar. But now
They blink at the light,
Like old brown owls
Awaiting the night.

A SONG ABOUT A LAMB

'O God, the Sure Defence
Of Jacob's race,
Lover of innocence
And a smooth face,
Accept my sacrifice—
A little lamb, bought at the market price.

'With fleece so soft and clean
And horns not yet
A-bud, the creature's been
The children's pet.
And sore they wept to see
Their snub-nosed friend come trotting after me.'

God heard: the lightnings brake
Forth in his honour;
But by some slight mistake
Consumed the donor.
The lamb fell in a muse—
But soon took heart, and leaped among the pews.

HYMN FOR A CHILD

Flocking to the Temple
See the priests assemble
Where a child expounds
What the wise confounds.

All the scribes and sages
Quit their dog's-eared pages;
Spell-bound by his sense
And his eloquence.

Speaking without bias,
He reviewed Elias;
Said the dogs did well,
Eating Jezebel.

Just as he disposes
Of the Law and Moses,
Mary came in haste—
Caught him to her breast:

'We have sought thee' saying—
Chid him for delaying.
Then without demur
He went back with her.

Those he was amazing
Straightway broke out praising;
Calling him a mild,
Nicely brought-up child.

Teach me, gentle Saviour,
Such discreet behaviour
That my elders be
Always pleased with me.

THE SCAPEGOAT

See the scapegoat, happy beast,
From every personal sin released,
And in the desert hidden apart,
Dancing with a careless heart.

'Lightly weigh the sins of others.'
See him skip! 'Am I my brother's
Keeper? O never, no, no, no!
Lightly come and lightly go!'

In the town, from sin made free,
Righteous men hold jubilee.
In the desert all alone
The scapegoat dances on and on.

BYRON 1924

Much as they all deplored his morals
Our fathers left the bard his laurels.
But in these more precisian days
We shake our young heads over the lays.

GRACE AND GOOD WORKS

Blest are the poor, whose needs enable
The rich but timely charitable
To take the Kingdom of Heaven by force.
The poor are also saved, of course.

MORNING

The long, long-looked-for night has sped.
'Tis time we should arise
Out of this tossed and blood-stained bed
Where a dead woman lies.

FAITHFUL CROSS

Strange, that his sorrow should
Only be understood
By two rough pieces of wood.

The friends that lingered there,
However true they were,
Had grief of their own to bear.

They stood and mourned apart:
With but half a heart
For his sorrow and smart;

They mourned, and went their way
Into Heaven to be gay.
The Cross is faithful to this day.

O Tree of Life, that root
Hast not, nor hope of shoot,
Nor but this one sad fruit—

Thou, not Mary or John—
Thou, that he died upon
He chose for his eidôlon.

Though he by a word or two
Or a look, men's hearts could woo
And knit, as none else could do;

Not one of the brotherhood
To whom he did good,
But two rough pieces of wood,

Hewn-off, exanimate,
Could carry and constate
His and his sorrow's weight.

THE MAID'S TRAGEDY

I KEPT two singing birds
In a cage of bone—
Hatched-out on the same day;
But since one flew away,
T'other's alone.

I spoke him gentle words
And bade him sing.
But he hung down his head
As if discomforted,
And drooped his wing.

My mood was turned to rage;
I stinted his seed,
Opened the cage-door wide—
Starve, or begone! I cried.
He did not heed.

Silent within his cage
I see him mope
Like any turtle-dove.
The dumb bird I called Love,
The flown bird, Hope.

COMMON ENTRY

I HATE my neighbour with bitter hate—
Night and morning, early and late,
Her and her works to the Fiend I commend;
For she's had it mended—the garden gate.

For every comer 'twould grind and squeak;
But when One came here who had most to seek
It would cry aloud at his hasty shove,
'Here, here's your lover!' and redden my cheek.

Oh yes, he still comes, though the gate doesn't tell—
But I wish my neighbour were deep in Hell.
How dare she the least of my joys estrange,
Or threat me with changes when all's so well?

THE ALARUM

With its rat's tooth the clock
Gnaws away delight.
Piece by piece, piece by piece
It will gnaw away to-night,

Till the coiled spring released
Rouses me with a hiss
To a day, to another night
Less happy than this.

And yet my own hands wound it
To keep watch while I slept;
For though they be with sorrow,
Appointments must be kept.

MATCH ME O ROSE!

A RED rose shining in the sun
Told me of summer new-begun.
I smoothed each petal, and kissed each petal,
And counted them one by one.

Eighteen—and I had two years more.
'Match me, O rose!' I said; and tore
In half two petals, two crimson petals,
To bring them to a score.

Just at that moment the wind blew—
Petal by petal away I threw,
And turned to the rose-bush, the lovely rose-bush,
Where other roses grew.

THE ONLY CHILD

When I was small
My mother had an Indian shawl,
Spun from the friendliest kind of goat
And dyed a comfortable red.
And when I had a pain in my throat
I used to take the shawl to bed.

So soft it was
That through her wedding-ring 'twould pass;
So warm, it nursed all care aside;
So wide, a covey of babes might be
Happed up in it—soft, warm and wide
As sleep, that shawl was lent to me.

THE BURNING-GLASS

All day the Sun looked down
On England; heath and town,
Cornland and woodland, mountain and champaign,
And the bright tangled skein

Of Thames, Avon, Severn, Trent—
Everywhere his beams went.
They lightened upon ships far out to sea,
And sifted every tree.

And few, and dull, were they
Abroad in England that day,
But looking up at the blue heavens overhead,
'Fine harvest weather,' said.

Turning him to his rest
Within the patient West—
As though he kept the primal law in mind
To multiply his kind—

Throughout the land his rays
Set windows in a blaze;
But nowhere, save at Wells in Somerset,
Did a live Sun beget.

There, under cottage brows,
Glittered intact the spouse
Whose steadfast welcome the steadfast greeting could match,
And fired a neighbour's thatch.

Strange chance! (Enough to undo
Man's wit, might he look through
Seeing, and know the Sun an enormous spark
In caves of endless dark;

And, like ourselves, condemned
His little light to expend
By rote. But our imaginations deck
The heaven's hideous black.)

Strange chance! meeting well-met!
Chance more wild-faring yet
I woo, that with long hope and true intent
My burning-glass present

To that unmeasured, un-
surmiseable incendiary of suns—
Life—that some beam of it, matched by my art,
May fire a stranger's heart.

PEEPING TOM

TO T. F. POWYS

Out of the land
He grew as grows the weed,
But had no land
For his own need.

He to a farmer
His crafty sinews hired,
Rising up early
And going home tired

For six days of the week—
Poor Tom!—and said on Sunday,
Leaning over a gate:
'To-morrow be Monday.'

Few were his thoughts,
Devious, and unexpressed;
Yet one strong yearning
Swelled in his breast

Through rain and shine,
Through months of earthly labour;
Till at last he spoke
His thought to a neighbour.

'I should like well
To have some land of my own,
To be my land
And mine alone:

'Say, half an acre—
More would outdo my means—
To grow potatoes
And a few beans.'

Up at the Inn
His neighbour made it known
How Tom wished
For land of his own.

About the village
To all men's ears it ran;
The farmer heard it,
Who was a rich man.

Green water-meadows,
Large barns, deep fields he had;
His servant's wish
Made his heart glad,

For he in plenty
Was rooted like an oak;
And Tom's half-acre
Seemed a good joke.

He gave the ground.
And all men said of him
He could well afford
To have his whim.

The plot of ground which the farmer gave
Did not cost him dear.
All unfenced and untilled it lay,
And far away
From cottage and inland tree;
Where the rolling down rears up like a great slow wave
And then falls sheer
Four hundred feet to the sea.

Thither poor Tom,
His day's toil over, would walk;
And marked, and swaled,
And scratched on the chalk—

Too much intent
To note the oncome of night
Till to ease his back
He stood upright.

And plodding homeward
Through nurtured fields, his mind
Still delved in the patch
He had left behind.

Sea-winds blew there,
Sea-birds flew there,
Nothing grew there

Save the inherent tares of barren ground;
Grasses shrivelled and stiff,
And frantic thistles scattering their seed.
Claw-rooted was each necessitous weed
And salt to the taste,
For the blown rack groped over the waste,
And evermore the sea with a trampling sound
Beleaguered the cliff.

A row of beans
Was the first thing Tom set.
Most died: the rest
The rabbits ate.

He gave up beer
And saved to buy a fence.
His wife blamed him
For having no sense;

And all his friends
That saw him study and grieve—
Landless themselves—
Laughed in their sleeve.

Tom heard them out;
He did not say them Nay,
But still to his patch
Went day by day,

Disheartened, perhaps,
But redeless to forgo
The dogged dream
He had cherished so.

And little thought
His straitened brain-pan knew
Save only that
There was much to do.

From the beginning
The weeds had been his bane,
And tilling the ground
Made them as bad again.

He groaned aloud
To see how they would thrive
Where nothing he planted
Could keep alive;

And fresh weeds grew
That had not grown before;
For each he spudded
There sprang ten more,

That bloomed in his face
As if from very spite.
It chanced, such a blossom
Caught his sight

Just as he struck work.
His back was aching so
That he was half-minded
To let it go,

But from long habit,
With look indifferent,
Above the invader
Wearily he bent

To root it up:
His face by slow degrees
Awakened.
He went on his knees—

There is no beauty like the beauty of the wild,
That blossoms suddenly out of the bare hillside.
It is the barren woman that goes with child,
It is the clenched knot of necessity untied,
Eternity waylaid, and labouring creation
Into forgetfulness and laughter beguiled:
A relenting, a reconciliation, a glimpse of the bride,
Nature, hidden under her dark veils of Time and Space and Causation.
Out of the hillside a word:
'Lo, here I am! Quick, gather my secret, cried—
Had you not come—to the waste, from pole to pole
To echo forever unheard. Had I died, had I died,
Perished had with me, unguessed, the clue of the whole.
But now are the heavens opened, and Salvation

Is sprung up like a flower out of the earth.
Look! I am newly-made, the dew of my birth
Is of the womb of the morning; I hold in my wide-
open petals the epitome of that blue
In seas drowned, in distance secluded, in air enskied:
And all, all is for you.
Come! Kneel beside me and unlearn your soul.'

Ah, not for man the message, the revelation!
On hillsides desolate and bare, by paths untravelled,
In swamps, and skyey wastes the tokens are spilled.
Wild beauty like a bird flits here and there,
Homes not to hand nor snare, and nowhere settles.
Who's he shall augur from her flight? And who shall dare
Unravel the plain speech of five blue petals?
Not man's mind, that chooseth a good
Obsequious to the God his proud heart hath chosen,
That parteth light from darkness and right from wrong,
Nor brooketh the unfulfilled.
Let him tread out the blossom and ignore the song
And go upon his way.

But some there are who hearken, who stay,
Who kneel and worship before the undesigned,
And all their strength relinquish to obey
A voice that seeks not to be understood—
No, nor yet purpose has enough to be a mock.
Awhile they feed on brightness; but ere long
They find their hearts astray, and their blood frozen,
And know themselves averted from their kind.

Extremity of light has made them blind.
With look so vacant as to seem serene,
They wander towards darkness, and as they go
Idly a few belated berries glean,
Or darnel and the clammy nightshade wreathe,
Or to themselves speak low;
And in the end lie down upon the rock,
And to the heedless air their last loud groan bequeath.

Darkness rose up out of the deep;
Headland by headland along the coast
Lost colour, shape, identity, stole from sight,
Folded in darkness like a flock of sheep.
Up on the height
The flower ebbed from his vision like a ghost,
And Tom went home to sleep.

Changed henceforward was his mood.
All he'd endeavoured, all he'd planned
Forgetting, his mind at ease, he would sit awhile
To watch the gulls, or stretched full-length would brood;
And camomile,
Chance-plucked, chafed for its savour in his hand,
And thyme or fennel chewed.

Mildly now he could behold
Thistle and coney flourish unchecked.
The unequal combat relinquishing he let fall
His spade, or only dug to smell the mould;

But joys past all
Former surmise he harvested from neglect,
That joyed nor reaped of old.

Sweetness had pierced him like a dart.
Careless of duty, afield he ranged,
And spared with fostering hand the weeds amid
The farmer's crops, such wonder was in his heart.
The farmer chid—
And swore the politicians were deranged
To take the labourer's part.

Christmas came, and quarter-day;
'Goodwill to all men' chanted the choir,
'And on earth, peace.' The earth in a riveted black
Frost fast bound like a cataleptic lay.
The times were slack.
The farmer said to Tom: 'I don't require
Servants not worth their pay.'

Household shipwreck disposing as best
He could, since none near by would employ
Such a half-wit, on a tramp for work he set out;
Of more than land and livelihood dispossessed,
For care and doubt
Sat plotting deep in his heart that his secret joy
Might vade with all the rest.

Everywhere rejected, he turned
Onward by darkening ways and grim

Gaunt woodlands where yet would kindle from bough to bough
The irresistible wildfire of spring for which he had yearned.
Small difference now
'Twixt leaves unborn or dead underfoot to him
Whom spring no more concerned.

Lengthening days would but strengthen his care,
Nor spring be even what once it had been—
A dazzle in dull eyes, chance heart-thrust of a bird's song,
Hint of a covenanted joy all creatures share;
For he too long
Had watched a wildflower's visage, and had seen
No hope, no purpose there.

Whither he went,
And what the welcome he found,
Or if he yet
Were above ground,

Came never word.
His name was clean forgot;
Unless folk said
Tom was a bad lot.

Many years after,
His tale was told to me.
I for a whim
Went off to see

Tom's patch, but might
Have sought in vain for it
Had not my foot
Caught in a bit

Of galvanised netting—
Good heartless shop-stuff, wrought
To outlast man
And man's thought.

I gave it a kick;
And after one more look,
Moved off to find
Some sheltered nook

Where I might sit
And watch the seagulls fly.
All that afternoon
No one came by,

Save one old man
Scarcely more human than they—
And he, I think,
Had lost his way.

For as he went
He'd stop and look about,
And shake his head,
As if in doubt

Of where he was;
And once, as though he'd read
The answer there,
Pulled up a weed

And peered at it
Full steadfastly—and then
Throwing it down,
Limped on again.

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